



Michael F. Easley
Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
Secretary, DENR

EASTERN TRAIL GETTING A BOOST

By CHARLIE PEEK
Public Information Officer

If there's to be an eastern segment of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST), its starting point will be at a series of small meeting halls in the towns along the Neuse River corridor.

Public meetings on the project began in earnest this fall as Greenways Inc. began to gather ideas and information from local officials and trail aficionados in that region. The Durham-based consulting firm was hired by the Division of Parks and Recreation to begin serious planning for the MST to reach from Falls Lake Dam in Wake County east to Cedar Island on the Pamlico Sound.

"So far, the concept has only been successful in the western part of the state and primarily on public property," said division Director Phil McKnelly at a meeting in Kinston. "We knew we were going to have a tough time, but I'm encouraged by how many people have gotten involved in the process."

The MST was conceived in 1974 as a 700-mile route reaching from Clingman's Dome in the west to the Atlantic coast. To date, about 430 miles have been built or mapped with the aid of

65 local task forces.

The time may be right to intensify efforts to extend the MST into the east, McKnelly said.

The devastating floods of Hurricane Floyd left much property along the Neuse River floodplain unusable for development. In Kinston alone, more than 1,100 properties have been acquired by the town through a federal buyout program designed to keep that land from being redeveloped.

Several towns and counties in the corridor have initiated greenway and park projects on flood-prone land.

At the same time, interest in protecting waterways and wetlands is growing, and federal and state trust funds can be a source of money for recreational development, McKnelly said.

The division's role is to help local governments stitch their plans together into an

MST prototype and to help coordinate their efforts with state and federal agencies, he said.

One well-planned section of the MST in the east can be the "success story" that will encourage other communities, he said.

Trails coordinator Darrell McBane said the planning contract "indicates the division's interest in making the Mountains-to-Sea Trail a



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MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA

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reality and will hopefully drive this effort over the next five to 10 years.”

The \$30,000 contract with Greenways Inc. was funded through the federal Recreational Trails Program.

Chuck Flink, project manager for Greenways Inc., said that his company will identify resources as well as obstacles to the project in a 1,000-foot-wide corridor along the Neuse. Another goal is to find ways to link local trail

systems, parkland and other recreational facilities to that MST corridor, he said.

The company will develop a plan of action and offer design guidelines in its final report, expected in mid-2003.

Flink said his company's experience includes developing a greenway system for the Grand Canyon, a redevelopment plan for flooded areas of East Grand Rapids, Mich., and working with trail systems in

most of the larger North Carolina cities.

In most cases, well-designed trail systems have offered an economic boost, Flink said, and that should help the MST gain support in Down East communities.

“There's opportunity for this to be an economic generator, a serious contributor to growth and development,” he said. “We're not just coming at this in terms of a recreational pursuit.”

The series of meetings – to be repeated in early 2003 – has drawn city and county officials as well as volunteers from trail organizations and outing clubs.

Some of these people offer the “ultimate knowledge” of an area and its resources, said Dave Josephus of Greenways Inc. For example, they can point out public or private trails near the corridor, and such things as old logging roads and hard-to-find points of interest. And, they often know of landowners likely to be friendly to the MST concept, Josephus said.

At an earlier meeting with people from Wake and Johnston counties, the division learned that Raleigh has been aggressively acquiring land along a 16-mile stretch of the Neuse for its greenway system and in Johnston County, one new subdivision already has a segment of trail along the river and other subdivisions are interested in the concept.

McKnelly said that throughout the state, the MST should be the backbone of an extensive system of land- and water-based trails and recreational resources whether on public or private lands.

From The Director's Desk

Dear fellow employees:

Every year that passes offers its own milestones, and 2002 had its share. Looking into 2003, there could possibly be some rough patches, particularly regarding budgets, but there are also some exciting milestones on the near horizon.

The division continues to make important strides in land conservation with the aid of three state trust funds and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. We're poised to make the single largest addition ever to Eno River State Park – the 815 acre “Eno Wilderness.” It includes 2.26 miles of river frontage near the interchange of Interstate 85 and US 70. We were also able to move quickly and take advantage of an unexpected opportunity at Raven Rock State Park, purchasing 714 acres that Weyerhaeuser Corp. was intent on selling before year's end. And, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, we're preparing to add Elk Knob State Natural Area to the system. That stunning 1,100 acres includes the highest peak in Watauga County.

The coming months are also likely to see completion of the much-anticipated master plan for Gorges State Park, as well as the stirrings of a new plan for the eastern segment of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. And, the division is making notable progress in creating a new radio communications system in tandem with the NC Highway Patrol.

These are just a few of the milestones that we can expect as 2003 unfolds. I look forward to the new year and the challenges it will bring, and I look forward to working with each of you as we continue our efforts to make the division's programs the best in the nation.

Sincerely,

Phil

Philip K. McKnelly

CAMPFIRE PROGRAM STRIKES A CHORD

The popularity of campfire programs given by many rangers at state parks was proven again in November when 25 visitors braved a cold, steady rain at the Crowders Mountain State Park visitor's center for a night of music, stories and marshmallows.

"I was very pleased with the turnout," said Ranger Jane Conolly who organized the program. "Especially with the weather the way it was. If it was not raining I think we would have seen double the numbers. Everyone seemed to have a good time. I saw a lot of smiles and people singing along and clapping."

The program was advertised in local papers as "Come rain or shine," and the lobby was prepared with chairs in front of the fireplace. Four local musicians had room to play where everyone could see them.

"We wanted to have it outside on the cold, fall night in our amphitheater adjacent to the visitor's center, but when it rained we just used the fireplace in the lobby," Conolly said.

The program was a team effort. Conolly began with a short talk on how to build a fire. Then she started the evening's campfire with flint and steel instead of matches and by telling a Cherokee story called "The First Fire."

Ranger Kelly Cooke almost brought the house down with a group participation song and dance called "Three Short-Neck Buzzards."

Conolly said, "Kelly really gets into that song. He seems made for it, and the audience keyed into his enthusiasm. Plus it's a really funny song and dance. It was great."



MUSICIANS LEND A FESTIVE NOTE TO CROWDERS CAMPFIRE PROGRAM.

New Crowders Mountain Ranger Scott Coffman assisted with building preparation and program set-up. Conolly helped visitors take turns at the fireplace roasting marshmallows and making S'mores. "It was difficult getting the marshmallows cooked, but everyone took their turn and it worked out. It would have been easier outside, but we adapted," she said.

The musicians performed on guitar, snare drum, banjo and mandolin. Darrell Bumgardner, who plays snare drum and mandolin and sings, brought his 11-year-old grandson, Brent Davis, who is an up-and-coming banjo player. Playing guitar were Bob Bigger and Jay Parsons, both of whom are regular hikers at Crowders Mountain and strong supporters of the park. Bob Bigger was actually a college student in the 1970s, who joined a peaceful protest march in support of the creation of the park.

Conolly arranged to

have a profile story on Bigger published in The Charlotte Observer, thus advertising the program and highlighting a strong park supporter.

"Bob has been involved with the park since its creation in the early 1970s," she said. "He's at the summit almost every weekend where he acts as an informal park ambassador. He has a very good voice and did a great job leading the sing-along for the program."

"We have great support from our local print media. Our programs always have a better public response when the newspapers do a story on them. We try to save newspaper articles for special programs."

The visitors attending the program included couples with children, senior citizens and young singles, Conolly said. "I was surprised by the demographic of those attending. It was across the board. I think we'll do this program again, maybe two or three times a year."

BOG RARE ADDITION TO PARKS SYSTEM

By CAROL TINGLEY
Chief of Planning
and Natural Resources

A new natural area has been added to the state parks system. The establishment of Beech Creek Bog State Natural Area was authorized by the General Assembly in the 2002 session, and acquisition of the core tract was completed in early November.

The new 120-acre unit is located in northwest Watauga County near its border with Avery County.

Beech Creek Bog is considered nationally significant and represents the first example of a southern Appalachian bog included in the parks system. Mountain bogs are among the most rare of natural communities in the southern Appalachians and in North Carolina.

Unlike northern bogs of glacial origin, southern Appalachian bogs form in poorly drained depressions or on gentle slopes, generally in relatively flat valley bottoms not subject to flooding. Because of the scarcity of flat, wet sites in the mountains, all types and subtypes of bogs are inherently rare.

Since flat sites are also much sought after for human activities, bogs have been highly vulnerable to draining, filling and development. Today, few bogs remain in good condition.

Beech Creek Bog is also noteworthy because both the bog itself and the surrounding watershed show very little disturbance and contain natural communities of excellent quality. The bog supports a large population of the rare bog clubmoss (*Lycopodiella inundata*), as well as other unusual species. The surrounding watershed is also impor-



THE NATURAL AREA SUPPORTS A LARGE POPULATION OF THE RARE BOG CLUBMOSS AND OTHER RARE SPECIES.

tant, protecting the hydrology of the bog and containing a high quality example of the northern hardwood forest community type.

The bog was acquired with the help of the Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust. The land trust assisted in negotiations with the landowner who had initially wanted to develop the area. The land trust also helped secure funding to complete the purchase and implemented the transaction on behalf of the state. Funding was also provided by the Natural Heritage Trust Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

Beech Creek Bog becomes the 15th state natural area in the parks system. Others include Weymouth Woods, Baldhead Island and Occoneechee Mountain. State natural areas are intended primarily to protect sites of outstanding natural or scientific value and generally have limited recreational facilities.

SAND ON THE RUN

A SIGNIFICANT SAND RELOCATION PROJECT IS UNDER WAY AT JOCKEY'S RIDGE STATE PARK. USING AN ALLOCATION FROM THE PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND OF \$469,903, THE DIVISION WILL MOVE ABOUT 125,000 CUBIC YARDS OF SAND FROM SOUTHSIDE ROAD TO THE SOUTHWESTERN QUADRANT OF THE PARK. CONTRACTORS HOPE TO MOVE AT LEAST 2,500 CUBIC YARDS PER DAY.



NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

PARK	% CHANGE (2001/2002)					
	NOVEMBER 2002	TOTAL YTD NOV. 2002	NOVEMBER 2001	TOTAL YTD NOV. 2001	NOV.	YTD
CAROLINA BEACH	12,980	228,273	15,912	247,072	-18%	-8%
CLIFFS OF THE NEUSE	6,069	133,903	6,895	128,333	-12%	4%
CROWDER'S MOUNTAIN	23,717	275,383	27,228	279,855	-13%	-2%
ENO RIVER	24,535	289,243	23,188	301,396	6%	-4%
OCCONEECHEE MOUNTAIN	3,776	33,498	2,680	33,689	41%	-1%
FALLS LAKE	35,874	1,009,355	37,099	1,127,177	-3%	-10%
FORT FISHER	44,173	977,568	38,866	638,526	14%	53%
FORT MACON	57,346	1,263,028	64,670	1,219,236	-11%	4%
GOOSE CREEK	9,371	130,395	9,697	110,328	-3%	18%
GORGES	8,272	152,048	8,174	95,788	1%	59%
HAMMOCKS BEACH	11,766	182,074	11,205	188,896	5%	-4%
HANGING ROCK	24,694	380,003	20,768	391,216	19%	-3%
JOCKEY'S RIDGE	43,179	961,674	41,257	971,966	5%	-1%
JONES LAKE	5,068	101,368	4,360	112,458	16%	-10%
JORDAN LAKE	31,207	1,534,147	57,880	1,202,728	-46%	28%
KERR LAKE	48,260	1,545,148	60,204	1,393,580	-20%	11%
LAKE JAMES	11,887	250,787	11,425	236,492	4%	6%
LAKE NORMAN	20,220	361,019	15,595	244,153	30%	48%
LAKE WACCAMAW	4,456	96,196	5,056	98,350	-12%	-2%
LUMBER RIVER	7,273	54,443	4,610	49,891	58%	9%
MEDOC MOUNTAIN	5,560	69,839	4,558	66,509	22%	5%
MERCHANT'S MILLPOND	6,511	87,444	6,072	80,627	7%	8%
MORROW MOUNTAIN	31,160	406,220	33,060	483,260	-6%	-16%
MOUNT JEFFERSON	8,123	95,853	6,631	88,920	23%	8%
MOUNT MITCHELL	32,512	554,433	30,255	540,974	7%	2%
NEW RIVER	6,852	150,621	6,092	125,664	12%	20%
PETTIGREW	5,149	78,070	4,810	85,060	7%	-8%
PILOT MOUNTAIN	36,962	375,538	31,015	410,291	19%	-8%
RAVEN ROCK	8,961	107,109	10,947	114,785	-18%	-7%
SINGLETARY LAKE	162	15,241	604	12,534	-73%	22%
SOUTH MOUNTAINS	13,944	159,769	12,312	177,884	13%	-10%
STONE MOUNTAIN	25,940	440,020	50,652	503,914	-49%	-13%
WEYMOUTH WOODS	2,539	26,933	2,710	25,505	-6%	6%
WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD	33,368	384,781	34,060	376,623	-2%	2%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	651,866	12,911,424	700,547	12,163,680	-7%	6%

AMEN CORNER

The following was sent to East District Superintendent William Berry. Heard other kind words about the division or its employees? Send them along to The Steward.

Dear Superintendent Berry,

I wanted to express my appreciation for the outstanding work of Sam Bland and Sean McElhone during our fall workshop at Hammocks Beach State Park. Lundie Spence of SeaGrant, Suzan Wallace of Sea Quest Studio and I collaborated to offer a Nature Journaling Workshop for educators from across the state. Most of the participants had never been to Hammocks Beach before and everyone left saying it was one of the most wonderful places in North Carolina.

Thanks to the assistance of Sam and Sean, we had a delightful weekend blending natural history and art. Sam and Sean helped us get our late arrivals over to the island on Friday night. They took us on a terrific boat tour Saturday morning. We had the chance to watch ospreys interacting over the water, observe dolphins running through the open water in the marsh, and sketch Huggins Island in our journals. Their wealth of natural history knowledge as well as personal experiences at the park made the trip much more than simply a "boat trip."

After lunch they let us observe as they inventoried a sea turtle nest. We were treated not only to a "lesson" in sea turtle ecology; we also got to witness 23 baby turtles crawling to the sea. Watching baby sea turtles was a "peak experience" for everyone. The educators who attended this workshop came away with a deeper appreciation for the challenges facing sea turtles and the diversity of life on a barrier island.

I am also indebted to Sam and Sean for their assistance in setting up this workshop and making arrangements for us to use the bunkhouse. They also provided much needed help transporting our belongings back to the dock at the end of the weekend. On a personal note, I am grateful that they took care of a box of belongings (including two cameras) that was accidentally left behind.

You are fortunate to have such fine people working for you. They are wonderful ambassadors for all of North Carolina's state parks. I truly look forward to working with them again.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Baird
Coordinator of Student Outreach and Distance Learning

Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation is:



- to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;
 - to provide and promote outdoor recreation opportunities throughout North Carolina;
 - to exemplify and encourage good stewardship of North Carolina's natural resources
- and*

for all citizens and visitors of North Carolina.

The Steward

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